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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: review of further implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2005/1.

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In accordance with the principles, goals and commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration (Social Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995), the Programme of Action contains specific elements regarding the family, as they relate to, inter alia, promoting an enabling environment based on a people-centered approach to sustainable development, eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration.

Specifically, the Programme of Action states that "Particular efforts should be made to protect children and youth by : "(a) Promoting family stability and supporting families in providing mutual support, including in their role as nurturers and educators of children" (Programme of Action, chapter II D, para. 39 (a)).

The twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (Resolution S-24/2 "further initiatives for social development"" December 2000) says that "Greater attention should be paid to helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing role, to the causes and consequences of family disintegration and to the adoption of measures to reconcile work and family life" (Chapter III, commitment 4. Para. 56).

The family in society

The concept of "household" is often used as a proxy for the family; however, the concept of "household" merely implies co-residence and may include persons not perceived as being members of the same family.

The family offers a unit of mutual support, shared resources and burdens, emotional balance and love. Families are the first school for social integration, the centering unit where all rights and values evolve and are transmitted.

The strength of society depends largely on the vitality and force of the family. And society welfare and development are mostly based on both institutions: society and the family.

The wide range of problems confronting the family indicates that, rather than being ignored within the development process, families should be taken into account when discussing social development activities that may affect them.

It is no longer adequate to merely indicate that the family is the basic unit of society and then to ignore the consequences the development process may have on families.

We think that a consensus has been reached about the role of the family in human society and its centrality to development. As such, the family – as a strong force for social cohesion and integration - needs the full support and protection of society and the State, especially in the case of families under economic and social stress, for the benefit of generations to come.

Work and Family Life

The reconciliation of work and family life is still a utopia nowadays.

An OECD series ("Babies and Bosses", 25-10-04) reviews policies in OECD countries to support parents in their choices of work and childcare options, and recommends a range of measures to improve results.

This publication says that "Declining fertility rates are a concern in most countries" and that strong economies and manageable pensions systems depend on both higher fertility rates and higher employment rates.

The OECD series recommend a range of measures and policies to improve results, among them to invest in family-friendly policies (as many Governments are doing with satisfactory results) and to provide support for working families with infants and children. Policies contributing to gender equity and child development include:

low effective tax rates and public investment in childcare and after-school care to make it easier for mothers to take paid jobs.

Workplaces can do more to provide flexible working hours, including part-time employment, to help parents to stay in the workforce and balance the requirements of their job with their children's day-to-day policies.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

Our organization welcomes the resolution to keep the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family as an integral part of the agenda and the multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development.

This will no doubt encourage a number of Non-governmental organizations to hold meetings and seminars on the tenth anniversary beyond 2004.

On the occasion of this important event, some follow-up should be seriously envisaged, such as maybe a formal declaration on the family.

A Declaration of the Responsibilities, Functions and Rights of the Family

The International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 5-13 September 1994) contains a full chapter on "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structures" (Programme of Action, chapter V).

Societies worldwide recognize that the family has a number of social functions and responsibilities. In fact, historically and by definition, families can be considered as the first private sector with their adhering share of responsibilities, which, in turn, should have their counterpart in certain rights.

The Foundation for the Rights of the Family feels that a declaration on family responsibilities, functions and rights should be one of the aims of the follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the I.Y.F.

We therefore would suggest that an open-ended group be created within the Commission for Social Development to review and extract relevant provisions on the family from national laws, international instruments and existing draft declarations.